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ABSTRACT

Focusing on academia as an organizational entity, this paper discusses feminist standpoint epistemology (FSE)--defined as the idea that the world looks different depending on the individual's vantage point--and offers tools to transform teaching and research endeavors in organizational communication. It also offers extended excerpts about the experiences and challenges faced by a Black female faculty member at the University of Colorado. The paper centers discussion around Sandra Harding's (1991) conception of FSE: (1) advocating using women's lives as a foundation for constructing knowledge; (2) demanding that academe allow women to speak from and about their views of reality; and (3) using women's everyday lives as a basis for criticizing dominant claims based on men's lives. The paper argues that there are many reasons why FSE should be incorporated into the study of organizational communication, a field that has been known to greet feminism with silence. The paper also states that gender studies in organizational communication tend to assess gender as an independent variable rather than a social construct. The paper addresses a range of issues that have influenced this particular faculty member, including the difficulty of knowing when to take issue with inaccurate comments; how and when to contest inappropriate styles of management; how to deal with those who question her abilities, implicitly or explicitly; and how to manage the social demands on her as a black woman faculty member in a largely white university. (Contains 58 references.) (TB)

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TWICE BLESSED, DOUBLY OPPRESSED: WOMEN OF COLOR IN ACADEME

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"Organizational communication needs scrutiny and transformation" (Bullis, 1993, p. 148).

"At its best, feminist theory is transformative." (Mumby, 1993, p. 164)

"Transformation is the process of revealing unity among human beings in our world, as well as revealing important differences." (Butler, 1991, p. 74).

Although scholars have cited a need for incorporating feminism into studies about organizational communication, few research projects have done so. In this paper, I discuss feminist standpoint epistemology (FSE), and I offer it as a tool for helping us to scrutinize organizational communication and to transform our teaching and research endeavors. After providing an overview of FSE, I present a rationale for my position. Then, I detail my standpoint as an African American female organizational communication scholar, and I offer vignettes from my personal experiences. Finally, I discuss implications of the issues that I have raised.

Throughout the essay, I focus on academia as an organizational entity. I intersperse some of my own experiences to illuminate issues, and to afford the reader a glimpse into my everyday reality. Please note that my experiences do not necessarily represent those of other women of color, of other women, or of other persons of color. I acknowledge the situatedness of my life, even as I share my stories as exemplars of what it's like to be a woman of color at a predominantly white university.

Feminist standpoint epistemology

Standpoint epistemology is based upon the simple idea that the world looks different depending upon one's vantage point. Socialist feminists borrowed this concept from work by Marx, Engels, and others (Hennesey, 1993). I center this discussion around Sandra Harding's (1991) conception of FSE, although her version is one of several. Moreover, her work stems from other feminist explorations of the topic (e.g., Hartsock, 1983; Rose, 1983; Smith, 1987). Thus, as Rixecker (1994) points out, Harding's vision is not univocal.

FSE advocates using women's lives as a foundation for constructing knowledge; it demands that we allow women to speak from and about their views of reality; it instructs us to use women's everyday lives as a basis for criticizing dominant claims which are based upon men's lives (Harding, 1991). Thus, FSE challenges traditional epistemic frameworks. For instance, whereas the Western formulation of rationalism creates separate spheres for reason and emotion, feminist standpoint epistemology strives to weave them together, maintaining that both play a role in creating knowledge: knowledge is not value-free (Rixecker, 1994).

FSE does not essentialize the category "woman." Rather, it encourages us to hear voices of many women, thereby responding to criticisms that early feminist work focused only on white middle-classed females.[1] Harding's vision (1991) of FSE incorporates and emphasizes the importance of the multiplicity of contexts that women encounter. "Standpoints," she asserts, "are socially mediated" (p. 276) (also see Rixecker, 1994, pp. 124-127). Finally, FSE encourages scholars to elicit input from members of oppressed/excluded groups as starting points to help "frame research questions and concepts, develop designs, define what counts as data, and interpret findings" (Wood, 1993, p. 12).

Rationale

Several related reasons undergird this call for incorporating feminist standpoint epistemology into the field of organizational communication. First, as noted above, a need exists to incorporate feminist perspectives into the study organizational communication. Some organizational communication scholars have discussed the applicability of FSE to our area of study. For instance, Judi Marshall applies it in her feminist critique of organizational communication (1993). Marshall provides a feminist interpretation of Hall's (1976) model of high- and low-context cultures, thus giving us an exemplar for how organizational communication scholars can deconstruct core

[1] Stemming from concern that feminism reflects concerns only middle class white women, some African American women identify themselves as "womanist," to represent a nonseparatist struggle for all oppressed persons (including men of color) (see Townes, 1993; Walker, 1983).

concepts. She presents a compelling argument for a gendered appreciation of communication, and she outlines steps toward re-visioning organizational communication.

In their commentaries on Marshall's essay, Connie Bullis (1993) and Dennis Mumby (1993) concur with her observations and suggestions. In an essay entitled, "At Least it is a Start," Bullis notes that Marshall's chapter is "a welcome change from the silence with which organizational communication has greeted feminism" (p. 144). Bullis offers a feminist historical account of organization to illuminate feminism's importance for the field, and she advances FSE as a viable resource for the study of organizational communication. Mumby extols the key role that Marshall's critique plays in illuminating the "fundamentally political relationship between theory and experience" (p. 155). Echoing Flax (1990), Mumby advocates reframing feminist theory to address "gender relations." Thus, he contends, we can avoid the essentialism that pervades much feminist work. In an earlier endeavor, along with Linda Putnam, Mumby applied a postructuralist feminist approach to deconstruct the concept of bounded rationality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992).

FSE appeals to me because it sanctions obtaining viewpoints of a variety of women. I perceive a need to elicit input from women of color because race and gender continuously demarcate one's placement in the labor market and one's location in the power structure of U.S. society at large. Women of color traditionally occupy the bottom of the list in terms of income and employment (Rothenberg, 1988), and barriers to advancement in the workplace are especially pronounced for Chicanas and African American women (Conrad, 1994). Although statistics support this notion, they do not begin to reveal the daily injustices and discomfort, the complexities which accompany the economic realities.

Gender studies in organizational communication tend to assess gender as an independent variable, rather than as a social construct. Moreover, research usually concentrates on white collar women (women working in male-dominated jobs), despite the fact that most women still work in female-dominated occupations (Harkess, 1985). Furthermore, researchers began addressing gender issues only after

(white) women began to assume non-traditional (i.e., managerial or other traditional male occupations) positions. This pattern of attention tends to overlook women of color and other working class females.

Discussions about women and the workforce generally overlook or omit the fact that women of color and other working class females have been part of the workforce since the early 1900s (Amott & Matthaie, 1991). It was only when middle-classed women were forced to work because of economic reasons in the period beginning in the mid-70s that the topic came to the forefront. Rarely have researchers looked at traditional female work or those jobs which persons of color tend to occupy (e.g., secretaries, maids, waters/waitresses, factory workers, etc.).[2] Even among the limited number of studies about black professionals, the experiences of black women receive fleeting reference (Bell, 1990). Moreover, research about "people of color" typically focuses only on blacks, thereby overlooking members of other ethnic plurality groups. Thus, giving voice to a variety of women of color will help to redress a long-standing exclusion of a group of persons who embody a significant segment of the workplace. Equally as important, as "outsiders within" (see Collins, 1991), or "strangers," women of color can serve as a type of resource that Bullis (1993) (citing Harding, 1991), describes:

> Strangers bring combinations of both nearness and remoteness that aid objective points of view. Strangers can identify patterns that are not identifiable by those within. Men, from this point of view, are the 'natives' who are too immersed in dominant institutions to have the distance necessary to see. Women, then, may view dominant language systems or discursive formations and practices more readily than men may. Gaps between what women feel obliged to say and what they think provide resources for analyses. (p. 153)

Due to their membership in groups stigmatized for their race-ethnicity, women of color may enact the role of "stranger" differently than white women (see, for example,

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[2] For exceptions, see Pringle (1989); Spradley (1974); and Zavella (1987).

Bell, 1992; Feagin, 1991; Fulbright, 1986; Higginbotham & Weber, 1993; Houston, 1994). Thus, adding women of color to our research may increase the likelihood of accurately depicting and understanding communication processes.

Moreover, such efforts could inform critical studies of organizational communication. As Mumby (1993) notes, "If critical research wishes to remain true to its emancipatory impulse, we must find ways to overcome the continued marginalization of those whom we study" (p. 21).

FSE could help us to address the need to develop curricula and research that responds to social issues (see Allen, 1995; Putnam, 1990). It also could help us to identify "inequity indicators" in the workplace (see DeWine & Daniels, 1993). Finally, FSE would thwart the tendency in organizational communication research to rely on rationalist approaches and positive outcomes (Allen, Gotcher, & Seibert, 1993).

My standpoint

Similar to Marshall (1993), I speak from a perspective that "I own and am rigorously reflective about" (p. 123). Based on a belief that all meaning is in context, I offer the following comments to contextualize the remainder of this essay.

My standpoint derives from the fact that I am an African American and I am a female. Gender and race-ethnicity are socially-constructed aspects of identity which influence ways that human beings interact with each other. Thus, race and gender (and their intersection) are salient for my everyday activities and experiences. Echoing bell hooks, another black female scholar, I would not say that I am a feminist, but I do advocate feminism (hooks, 1984).

My standpoint also derives from an ongoing self-conscious struggle to develop new interpretations of familiar realities (see Collins, 1991; Harding, 1991). The title of this paper reflects two key aspects of this struggle. "Doubly oppressed" refers to "double jeopardy" or "multiple jeopardy" -- the idea that a woman of color may suffer discrimination, prejudice, etc. based on either her

gender, her race, or both (Beale, 1970; King, 1988; Segura, 1992; Spelman, 1992). Thus, she contends with sexual and racial stereotypes as well as racism and sexism, and she often wonders which, if either, may be occurring as she interacts with others. In some situations, she may be considered a "twofer," someone hired because administrators could count her as both a female hire and a racial minority. Thus, people with whom she interacts may explicitly or implicitly question her right to be there.

Moreover, she may endure demands on her time because of her membership in two marginalized groups. For instance, as a "token," she often is called upon to represent either women or people of color or her particular group. Because a woman of color is simultaneously a member of two oppressed groups, a dialectic of identity occurs when she has to negotiate the contradictions of dual membership (Collins, 1991).

I experienced this type of conflict when one of my former students, an African American male, was accused of rape. Some members of the black community wanted me to support the student when he was barred from campus prior to his trial, and women's groups wanted me to support their position that the student should not be allowed on campus.[3]

Fortunately, that example depicts an extreme case. However, I often experience less cogent situations in which I feel torn between being identified because of my race-ethnicity or my gender. When I was the only black female member of a job search committee, the lone black male member often sought my support on racial matters, and the white female often looked for me to support her in agreement with issues related to women applicants.

"Twice blessed" signifies my conscientious efforts to reject the status of "victim," and "stigmatized other." Gloria Anzaldua (1983), in a book entitled <u>This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color</u>, captures this sentiment: "We are beginning to realize that we are not wholly at the mercy of circumstance, nor are our lives completely out of our hands. That if we posture as

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[3]Rape is a particularly controversial topic between black and white feminists (see, for example, Collins, 1991).

victims, we will be victims, that hopelessness is suicide, that self-attacks stop us on our tracks" (p. iii). I've taught myself to celebrate positive, valuable consequences of having been socialized as a black person and as a female. While I do not deny that I am oppressed and others like me are oppressed, I believe that I am blessed to be a black woman. Moreover, as I explain below, I believe that I am a blessing "when and where I enter," to use a title from a book about black women in the United States (see Giddings, 1984).

As I grapple with the notion of being twice blessed and doubly oppressed, I feel myself becoming an active agent for social change. As I describe later, the circumstances of my role as a black female academician at a predominantly white university have conjured deep emotions and a strong sense of responsibility and commitment which may not have emerged if I had remained at my former place of employment--a historically black university. Although I previously have been involved in community activities like voter registration and tutoring underprivileged children, I recently have felt compelled to become more proactive about resisting social injustices, particularly as they relate to race and gender. Therefore, I plan to bring my "outside" concerns into my academic career by conducting research that explicitly addresses my concerns. As Deetz (1992) points out, we should implement theory that typifies the kinds of societies that we wish to produce.

Woman/Women of Color in Academe[4]

Within this section, I provide snippets from my "intellectual autobiography" (see Minnich, 1990), and I intersperse them with research and anecdotal data. My objective is to portray scenes from the everyday reality of woman/women of color in the academy, to reveal some "micropolitics of interaction" (see Marshall, 1993, p. 132). Although you might read this text as it relates to a number of issues, I would like for you to consider its implications for theorizing about organizational socialization, and for

[4] For extensive discussions about women of color in academia, see Moses, 1989; Nieves-Squires, 1981; and Segura, 1992.

conducting critical analyses which, as Deetz (1992) recommends, display the hidden in order to open discourse.

I've always wanted to be a teacher. That aspiration probably stems from the high value that members of my (black) community placed on education, and because females were socialized to be either nurses or teachers.

Being black helped me to gain entry into the ranks of tenure track faculty. I was completing my doctoral program at a predominantly black university when one of my dissertation committee members, a white female, told her dissertation advisor that I would be a good candidate for an Assistant Professor position in his department at the University of Colorado (CU). He had asked her to be on the lookout for minority graduate students. I was going through the motions of applying for jobs primarily to appease her. I had worked toward my Ph.D. on a part-time basis, primarily because my job allowed me to take two free classes each semester. I hadn't thought about what I'd do once I finished the program, and I was content with my position as an instructor (teaching a Liberal Arts course on Computers and Society). However, when I was offered the job at CU, I had no choice but to accept. I could not turn down such a promising opportunity.

Most of my friends and colleagues at Howard University were pleased for me. A couple of them, however, hinted that I was selling out. I explained that I could be a role model for black students at CU, and I could serve the race by interacting with white students who probably never had a black teacher before. Plus, I could gain experiences and advance myself as a scholar. One day, someone placed a newspaper article about racism at CU on my desk.

The then-chairman of the department at CU (we've had three since 1989) warned me that, because I was a black female, I'd be asked to sit on "every damned committee." He told me that if I didn't want to serve on any of them, I could say that he didn't allow me. He also told me that I should succeed in academia because I was a good writer--I just needed to identify something to write about.

At a welcome reception for new "minority" faculty, a black male professor pulled me aside and said "I heard that

someone in your department doesn't think that you can write." Stunned, I responded calmly, "I find that hard to believe, since the faculty voted unanimously to offer me the position." I still don't know why he told me that.

During my first year in the tenure track, one of my white male colleagues cautioned me against getting too friendly with another faculty member because she had been overheard telling a group of students that I was not qualified to do the job, that I was hired only because I was a black woman.

When the president of the Black Student Alliance asked me to be group's faculty representative, I consented. At a ceremony in which I received an award as "Outstanding Black Professor," a black female faculty member told me, "That doesn't count; they (faculty and administrators who make promotion decisions) don't care about that."

One day when I was questioning my decision to move to Colorado, one of my white male students sent me an e-mail message in which he observed that I didn't seem as enthusiastic as usual, and he said, "we are glad you're here." He also told me that he hoped I would feel better.

Enclosed with one "rewrite and resubmit" letter from a journal editor was my original manuscript. A reviewer instructed me not to use the first person, and s/he had circled in red ink each and every "I" in the document.

Because I'm black, female, and accessible, a rare combination on my campus, I'm called upon in ways that my counterparts probably are not. I spend a lot of time in one-on-one interaction with a variety of students, who often discuss personal problems. Students of color who are not in my classes seek me to discuss their concerns. White faculty members and graduate students often consult me about how to deal with black students in their classes. Some of the incidents they have described have distressed me, to say the least. Before I began writing about race and gender issues, a few of my colleagues asked me to give guest lectures on those topics. This situation frustrates me. I'm glad that people seek understanding and guidance, but I'm irritated that I seem to be the only logical resource. Plus, I don't get credit for this extra effort. However, I always respond

openly, honestly, and with sensitivity. I'm blessed to have insight which comes from being black and female and knowledgeable about teaching and communication. If I don't try to shed light or provide support and/or guidance, who will?

I came to campus early one Saturday morning to meet with an athlete who was considering applying to CU and becoming a communication major. As I opened the door for the white coed who was the candidate's escort, she looked beyond me and asserted, "We're looking for Dr. Allen." "That's me," I replied. I felt angry, not so much at her, but because the likelihood that a black female could be a faculty member actually was remote. Of course, she may have responded that way because I look so young; maybe she thought I was a student. . . well, at least a graduate student.

During my first few years, at CU I rarely said "no" when asked to serve on committees outside of my department. I met a lot of people, I learned a lot about the university, and I usually felt valued for my contributions. Members of the Alumni Board of Directors applauded me for my efforts, noting that whereas the Faculty Position previously had been a nominal slot, I was the notable exception. The President asked me to extend my term. Similarly, members of the Outreach Council invited me to continue beyond the allotted time frame. The Chair of the committee sent a letter of commendation to the chairman of my department.

As a member of the Interdisciplinary Telecommunications Graduate Program Committee, I was my usual diligent and personable self. I prepared for and attended early morning meetings, and I put a lot of effort into developing a new course proposal (which the University accepted). I was proud of being the only female and the only person of color on that committee. Moreover, I was one of only two persons from the junior ranks. Therefore, I was dismayed when the chairman of my department informed me that he would be replacing me on that committee. He offered no explanation, and the chairman of the committee (at that time the Director of Graduate Studies at the university) never said anything else to me--not even "thanks for your assistance."

At the same meeting when he told me about the telecom committee, the chair of my department notified me that I could no longer serve as a chairperson of graduate committees, nor could I sit on external graduate committees. This decision came from the Graduate School. I inferred that the powers-that-be decided to demote me because I had not published any articles. Perhaps any faculty member in my position would have received the same treatment. But when the chairman gave me this news, I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. I had no idea that they could snatch the rug from under me like that. I didn't let my chairman know how humiliated I felt.

Two years ago, the chair of my department and the dean told me that I should not accept any additional service commitments, that I had to confer with them prior to accepting any new assignments. I wanted to respond, "Yes, Dad," but I didn't. At a national communication conference, I mentioned this to a white female organizational communication professor, who was appalled. "They wouldn't do that to a white male," she asserted. That got me thinking. When I returned to CU, I told my chairman that I would inform him if I decided to join a committee, but that I would not be asking permission.

When the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program asked for volunteers to develop teaching portfolios, I jumped at the chance. Composing my portfolio proved to be an illuminating and rewarding experience. It revealed my strengths and uncovered areas where I could improve. I also felt validated because I recognized myself in many of the materials which described strategies and attitudes of effective teachers.

Because I was one of the first persons at CU to compile a portfolio, and because I am reputed to be a good teacher, I was invited to be a Faculty Associate in the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program. In that role, I conduct workshops for faculty members on developing portfolios, and I provide one-on-one consultation. I enjoy talking with faculty members about their teaching philosophies and concerns. They often express deep appreciation for a chance to talk about teaching--something that rarely happens at the university.

The first day that I convened an introductory course in organizational communication, a white male student informed that he was going to drop the course because, he said, "I've already taken a course to fulfill my ethnic studies requirement." In providing an overview of the course, I had never said a word about ethnicity. I inferred that he assumed that would be the topic because I am black.

CU offers funding for projects related to multiculturalism, or which will help members of ethnic plurality groups to develop as scholars. This program motivated me to conceptualize research on socialization of graduate students of color, and of faculty women of color because the process of learning the ropes of being a tenure track faculty intrigues me. Plus, the literature on socialization doesn't fully reflect my experiences. So, I've been interviewing graduate students and female faculty of color. I'm thoroughly enjoying the process, even though I've been horrified at some of the stories I've heard. The individuals that I interview always express gratitude to me for caring about and listening to their stories. I've become a mentor to a graduate student from another department. She says that my guidance and support have helped her to become more effective as a teaching assistant. I believe that my findings will inform practice as well as a theory--not only for people of color but for anyone who enters the academic pipeline.

When a white female graduate student asked me to supervise an independent study on feminism and organizational communication, I was happy to do so. I had intended to start reading that body of literature, but hadn't gotten around to it. That experience really opened my eyes and awakened my spirit. This paper results from my relationship with that woman and the insight that her work has given me.

As I reflect on teaching, research/writing, and service, the three criteria I'm evaluated on, I realize that I'm most drawn to and comfortable with teaching and service. Thus, it makes sense that I spent so much time on them in my early years at CU. Whenever the Personnel Committee cautioned me about the amount of time I was spending on service, I would feel insulted. After all, I am an adult. I know how to manage my time. Moreover, I came to CU with a

mission in mind. I wanted to make a positive difference for so-called "protected class" members of the university community. I now see that I gravitated toward activities that I knew I would succeed in, and which gave me immediate gratification. I wish that I had recognized what I needed to do, and/or that my colleagues had offered to help me become adept at research and writing. I believe, however, that they hesitated because they didn't want to seem patronizing or condescending.

In the past couple of years, my colleagues have played a pivotal role in helping me to learn the ropes of the research and writing aspect of my job. After about my second year, when I still hadn't published anything, the then-chair (#2) of my department told me that the tenured professors were willing to help me, if I wanted them to. They had agreed that I could formally work with any two of them, but all of them were available. I appreciate the way that the offered to assist me: they made it optional, and they did not seem to view me as deficient. I worked closely with two of my colleagues for over a year, and their input and support was invaluable. I'm proud of myself for accepting the offer, and for asking my mentors to be forthright in their feedback. Not only did they help me understand the process of conceiving and writing research for publication, but also they helped me to cope with other issues. For instance, when I received a scathing rejection letter, I mentioned it to one of my mentors, who has published millions of articles (OK, hundreds). When she commiserated with me, and described the tension that she feels prior to opening a letter from an editor, I felt much better. Now I understand that others experience similar feelings and apprehensions.

Over a happy hour drink with my academic grandfather, I complained to him that organizational communication didn't seem concerned with studying issues related to race. "Well, Brenda J.," he said, "why don't you write about it?" He offered me the chance to write a chapter on the topic for a reader in organizational communication that he was co-editing. I had to put my money where my mouth was. I wrote the chapter, and was pleased with it. Unfortunately, the book deal fell through. But, the chairman of my department suggested that I revise the chapter and submit it to a journal. Another professor in the department told me to

contact the editor of an appropriate journal to inquire about submitting. I followed his advice, I asked him to critique the article, I submitted it, and it was accepted for publication.

During a faculty meeting about our department's diversity plan, I asked how we intended to evaluate our progress. The chairman (#3) smiled, and said something like, "As long as we have you and X, [my friend and colleague who is lesbian], we won't have to worry." He then moved on to the next topic. Although I resented what I felt was a glib response that once again placed the responsibility on me to deal with diversity issues, I didn't press my point. Later, I scolded myself for not saying more.

Sometimes I feel like a coward when I don't speak up or follow through on issues that concern me (these aren't always about race or gender). Recently a high-ranking administrator told what I considered to be a derogatory joke about football players. I was the only person of color at the meeting, and the only person who didn't crack a smile at his joke. I wanted to tell him that I was insulted, but I held my tongue. I often hold back because I don't want to be seen as a militant black and/or an emotional female. And yet, as Marshall (1993) points out:

> Sensitivity to context is imperative to allow women [and people of color] to survive in an alien world, and yet it marginalizes and disempowers them. They are often trying to anticipate difficulties and to screen out unacceptable aspects of their heritage of female [racial-ethnic] values, or trying to manage the disturbance they create. (p. 135)

When I teach, I employ an interactive style, somewhat similar to the "call and response" tradition of black churches. I take a collaborative, cooperative approach to teaching and learning, recognizing in the tradition of Paolo Freire (1969) that I'm learning even as I teach. For classes of 30 or fewer students, I have them arrange the desks in a semi-circle, so that each student can establish eye contact with everyone else. I am expressive, humorous, and sometimes emotional. I allow my enthusiasm to show, and I also

express anger and disappointment. Basically, my approach to teaching stems from the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." As a black female, I don't want to be stereotyped. I wish to be treated as an individual. I wish to be challenged--with respect--to learn. Therefore, I challenge students to clearly express their thoughts and opinions, to be responsible for learning. Students usually struggle with my style initially. After a couple of sessions, however, most of them get into it. A few have given me the dubious compliment that my class is the only one that they attend regularly.

I have been pleased to recognize myself in literature that discusses women's ways of knowing, and cultural differences in communication. These include: a) Marshall's (1993) overview of themes that characterize women's speaking from their own ground (e.g., "exercising power with," "using emotional and intellectual intelligence," "twinning speaking and thinking as an epistemology," "facilitating others' development," and "emphasizing equality and participation") (p. 138)(also see Wood, 1993); and b) studies about cultural groups which found that members of collectivist traditions tend to engage cooperative strategies, to exhibit concern about care and responsibility, and to show a high sense of responsibility and personal standards (see, for example, Cortese, 1992; Cox & Nkomo, 1991; and Foeman & Pressley, 1987).

My awareness that I may be the first and only black teacher that my students will have compels me to be conscientious about how I comport myself. The subject matter that I teach and the fact that the classroom is my own domain allow me to behave as an agent for social change, but I must be careful not to alienate my white students. Therefore, I spend a lot of time thinking about how to present materials related to gender and race-ethnicity. And, I monitor my in-class responses.

Graduating communication majors have invited me three times to be the keynote speaker at their Convocation ceremonies. And, this Spring's graduating class named me, along with a full professor, as Most Influential Professor.

I've often wondered if my colleagues think that students rate me highly because of my personality.

Therefore, I was gratified this semester when an Associate Professor visited my class as a peer reviewer and wrote an incisive commentary about my teaching which revealed that he recognized my skills.

I was hired partially because my area of emphasis in organizational communication is computer-mediated communication (CMC). I chose CMC because I love working with computers. I also used to feel surge of pride when I cited CMC as my chosen area of expertise. After all, computing is traditionally a white male domain and if I'm part of it, my credibility increases, as does my market value. I used to resent it when someone would assume that my area of study was race and gender. Recently, however, due to introspection and reading about feminist issues as well as about black women intellectuals, I've become more attracted to gender and race studies.

Implications for Teaching and Research

I will reserve in-depth analysis of my stories for another paper. My purpose here is to stimulate thought, to provoke dialogue, and to encourage action. I have presented some of my experiences to illustrate that allowing a woman/women to speak from her/their own standpoint(s) might help us to revisit and reframe some of the core concepts of our area (e.g., organizational socialization, identification), to conduct critical analyses of organizational communication processes, to develop teaching materials and strategies which address the everyday reality of a variety of organizational actors, and to identify new issues to explore as we continue to develop as an area of study.

To begin this process, "we may need to create environments and forums in which meanings and female values can be expressed, voiced, and explored as part of an evolving process of discovery" (Marshall, 1993 p. 139). The Speech Communication Association convention where I presented this paper evinces one such forum. In addition, panel members (each of us spoke from our own standpoint) presented our papers at a colloquium within our university department. These represent important first steps. However, we must also begin to design and conduct research

to address these issues (for preliminary guidelines, see Allen, 1995).

The task will not be easy. Feminist scholars face the recurring challenge of trying to transform a traditional discipline while working within its boundaries (see DeVault, 1990). In addition, as Ashcraft (1994) notes, attempts to incorporate feminist perspectives into organizational communication must respond to controversial issues and/or tensions, including: a) avoiding essentialism; b) developing and agreeing upon standards for evaluation; and, c) inviting men into the discussion. FSE begins to address points a and c by pointing us toward a "gender relations" approach which might "focus on how gender has been constructed in ways that imprison men and women, that bind them together in a confining but unquestioned system of power relations" (Ashcraft, 1994, p. 3; also see Mumby, 1993). Thus, we could pull away from a tendency to operate based upon the formula that gender=female=problem. Moreover, in conjunction with gender, we should apply a similar approach to studying race-ethnicity (i.e., look at "race relations"; move away from the implied formula that race=people of color=problem).

FSE doesn't explicitly address the issue of developing standards for evaluation. Other questions also will haunt our endeavors. For instance, how do we separate knowledge from opinion? Does FSE advocate relativism?

We also must counter the tendency to encourage stories/accusations of victimhood which often occurs when oppressed persons are asked to tell their stories. Perhaps the concept of "twice blessed," or a similar positive perspective, can encourage persons whom we study to consider more than negative, aberrant outcomes/experiences.

These and other challenges should not deter us from forging ahead. As society deals with social issues like gender, race-ethnicity, and sexuality, organizational communication scholars should position ourselves at the forefront of intellectual discussion as well as practical research. Our history as an area of communication stems from addressing practical issues as we also engage in theoretical endeavors. Feminist standpoint epistemology furnishes an opportunity and an approach to address both.

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